creating safer class-rooms

a tool kit for teaching sta on addressing sexual violence

a publication by the sexual assault centre of the mcgill student's society, fall 2019

course content

It's also good to make your extension policy clear. Obviously, di erent departments and faculties have di erent constraints, but you should let students know that if they're experiencing personal di culties, they have a right to request extensions. Similarly, outline relevant contact information for students who may potentially require deferrals at the end of the term; most academic units require the submission of a re-

Handling sensitive topics

“Sensitive topics” is vague, perhaps frustratingly so. Use your judgement. If you’re teaching an entire seminar on genocide, the “sensitive topics” that you encounter are likely di erent from those found in a 200-level political theory survey or in a molecular biology research course. Context is key!

We can’t claim to have an exhaustive list of subjects which might be di cult to discuss in the classroom. Everyone is di erent, and students have diverse needs and prior experiences. However, a good rule of thumb is to assume that there is always a survivor in the room. Are you discussing eating disorders and psychiatric hospitalization? Are you discussing domestic violence and marital rape? Ethnic cleansing and forced displacement? Queer-bashing? Hate crimes? Police brutality? It’s entirely possible that your students have dealt with the negative e ects of these things, either personally or via their loved ones. e assumption that all students have led cushy, safe lives is implicitly exclusive. For women, for racialized, migrant, and refugee students, for queer students, for mentally ill students, for students with disabilities, these realities are likely more commonplace than some professors may assume.

Use content warnings. is shouldn’t be negotiable. Mention in your rst lecture that you’ll be dealing with di cult course content. Use speci c language. For example: if a speci c course reading mentions a violent, racially-motivated assault in detail, state it explicitly! Don’t just say “this mentions racism”. Put a note or asterisk next to the text citation in your syllabi, and then mention the content warning again in lecture prior to discussing it.

If you’re engaging in class discussion on one of these topics, make it clear that you know it might be di cult. Repeat any aforementioned content warnings. If possible, take breaks so that students can step out-- especially in smaller two- or three-hour long classes where they can’t do so discreetly.

Sometimes it's necessary to discuss sensitive content. Sometimes it's actually not ped

Undergrads

Unsurprisingly, the dynamics between students in classrooms are contextual. In con-

Grad students

(and teaching assistants!)

e stakes are higher for graduates, who o en occupy a very in-between position as both students and teaching sta . Graduate students can experience and perpetuate violence in unique ways.

Unless your department is particularly forward-thinking, TAs will have minimal training on sexual violence through mandatory online training modules (Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies currently only pays for one day of training for TAs). As such, you should set expectations for your TAs individually, especially if they need to address sexual violence and related topics in class or conference. Furthermore, you should make your behavioural expectations as clear as possible. TAs might think that their proximity

you and your peers

Professors and Students

Some professors (and other members of teaching sta) sleep with students. As an

“ere is nothing incentivizing professors to be good people.”

recognizing your position

While we want teaching to advocate for their students and cultivate healthier learning

Support and Reporting

Everyone has di erent boundaries vis-a-vis o ering emotional support. Many teaching sta may feel that taking on this role isn't part of their job, and balk at the idea of receiving disclosures. Furthermore, there is a clear-cut gendered divide in terms of

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O ering support

If a student comes to you with a disclosure, try to avoid being directional with them. Don't push them to report or go to the police. Many "formal" avenues for recourse are time-consuming, retraumatizing, and ultimately ine ective. Survivors should be able to make the decisions that are best for their own welfare and safety, and they will know their own situations better than anyone else. If they express an interest in pursuing these forms of recourse, you can direct them to the appropriate resources. e same is true for any decisions that they may make vis-a-vis their experiences of sexual violence-- seeking therapy, more secure housing, changing classes, et cetera. You need to let survivors come to some conclusions on their own, and the most that you can do is attempt to facilitate this process for them.

Ensure that your responses validate the experiences and emotions being discussed. A good rule of thumb is that you should spend three-quarters of your time listening, and one-quarter o ering responses. Assure students that you're happy that they came to you. Tell them that they deserve safety, kindness, respect, accommodations, et cetera. Ask how they want you to help-- maybe they just want a listening ear, or maybe they want more tangible, concrete forms of support. If it seems as though they don't have adequate support elsewhere, ask if they'd like to go over resources together. Appendix A of this tool kit outlines a few on- and o -campus resources which could potentially be useful.

Do not demand additional information from students. Don't ask them for speci c details of what happened, no matter how well-intentioned these questions may be. Don't ask them if this has happened to them before. Do not, under any circumstances, ask them what they were wearing, if they were drinking, or anything that could be read as shaming or blaming. Survivors have a right to set boundaries around how and when they disclose. Prying for additional information will not create the impression that you are a trustworthy or reliable con dant.

Reporting

Under the recently-revised Policy Against Sexual Violence, a disclosure is de ned specically as “the act of informing [OSVRSE] about an incident of sexual violence for the purpose of seeking support”. ough other community members are mandated to “endeavour to… communicate with OSVRSE with a view to providing the survivor with necessary support”, there are few clear-cut obligations for non-OSVRSE actors within the landscape of the university’s bureaucracy. As such, department chairs and faculty administrative sta aren’t always the best point of contact.

If a student expresses interest in seeking recourse within the university, you should direct them towards OSVRSE. is will ensure that their disclosure has the desired e ect. OSVRSE can direct survivors to McGill’s Special Investigator k BDC relTiole5 (l)-5 (O- es)52 (u)

appendix a: resources

- SACOMSS: e Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students' Society is a volunteer-run organization committed to supporting survivors of sexual assault and their allies through direct support, advocacy, and outreach. ey run a phone line and drop-in hours, and can guide students through McGill's complaints processes. SACOMSS can be accessed at 514-398-8500. SACOMSS also has curated a resource manual which can be used to nd a variety of other services-- feel free to call for referrals.
- McGill Peer Support Centre: e Peer Support Centre o ers free, non-judgemental peer support, and can help direct you toward other available resources.
- Nightline: A peer resource o ering a con dential, anonymous and non-judgemental listening, run by McGill students. Services include active listening, resource referrals and crisis management. Nightline can be accessed at 514-398-6246.
- OSVRSE: e O ce for Sexual Violence Response, Support, and Education provides support for all members of the McGill community who have been impacted by sexual violence and works to foster a culture of consent on campus and beyond. ey can be reached at osvrse@mcgill.ca.
- e Montreal Sexual Assault Centre: A free, bilingual service with a wide range of resources, including medical and legal aid, referrals, and a 24/7 helpline. e MSAC can be reached at 1-800-933-9007.
- Tele-Aide: A free, anonymous, bilingual listening service. Operates 24/7. Tele-Aide can be reached at 514-935-1101.
- McGill's Counselling and Psychiatric Services: can now be accessed through the Student Wellness Hub, at 514-398-6017.
- Project 10: o ers active listening, accompaniment, and referrals to queer-friendly health professionals to members of the LGBTQ+ community in Montreal. ey have also curated a list of racialized mental health professionals in the Montreal area, which can be found at bipocmentalhealth.tumblr.com. P10 can be reached at questions@p10.qc.ca.
- Head and Hands: NDG-based organization that o ers free medical and legal services to youth in Montreal, including those without status or health insurance. Head and Hands can be reached at 514-481-0277.

appendix B: contact info

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